



***Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond***  
**December 9-13, 2013**

## **Is it a good time to be 'Indian?': Connie Walker introduces new CBC Aboriginal website**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 09, 2013 5:00 AM ET



*Is it a good time to be 'Indian'? - Streeters from the imagineNATIVE Film Festival*

Connie Walker has been a host, producer and reporter at CBC since 2001. Most recently, she was a producer on the "8th Fire" documentary series. She is Cree from the Okanese First Nation in Saskatchewan. Follow her on twitter @connie\_walker

It's a tough question and one, I have to admit, that I was a bit nervous to ask: Is it a good time to be 'Indian?'

I thought of it after seeing [Jennifer Podemski's new movie, \*Empire of Dirt\*](#) — a powerful film about the lives of three First Nation women in Canada today.



*Cara Gee, left, and Shay Eye star in the multi-generational drama *Empire of Dirt*. (Mongrel Media)*

I was hesitant because I wasn't sure if people would be offended with the word "Indian." I also wondered how they would respond to such a broad question.

But when I posed the question to the audience of this year's imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts

Festival, I was blown away by the thoughtful and varied responses I got.

Blogger Lisa Charleyboy said, "It's always a good time to be an Indian."

But film director Jeff Barnaby wasn't so sure.

"I don't 100 per cent know if that's true at any point in the history of Canada," he said.

I quickly realized the answers to this question are as rich and diverse as our communities themselves.

I wanted to ask the question because it's something I've been asking myself. As someone who has been working in the news business for nearly a decade, I'm constantly immersed in Aboriginal news.



*CBC's Connie Walker interviews Lisa Charleyboy at the imagineNATIVE Film Festival in Toronto. (Lisa Charleyboy)*

And unfortunately, because of the nature of news, we're often telling the negative stories — a blockade, a missing person, or a housing issue, etc. It can start to skew your perspective after a while.

But lately, I've been noticing a change. For me, I think it started a few years ago, when I was working as a producer on CBC's *8th Fire* series.

For the first time in my career, a high-profile series was dedicated to telling our stories.

I still get goose bumps when I remember watching the first episode on TV. It was an incredible documentary, no doubt, but I think the part that gave me chills was just seeing native people talking about what it's like to be Indian on prime-time television.

When the elders came on the screen, I thought of my grandma, Margaret Walker. She ran away from residential school when she was a kid and was one of the "lucky" ones who made it home and never had to go back.



*Lee Maracle in Indigenous in the City, a documentary in CBC's 8th Fire series. (CBC)*

She always taught us to be proud of who we were, and I know she would have loved *8th Fire* too because it wasn't just about the negative stories.

I think that's why it resonated with so many people — because we saw ourselves reflected in what we were watching.

I had that feeling again while watching *Empire of Dirt*. I watched it with my sister and I started getting those goose bumps again, especially after one of the characters said, "Right now, It feels really good to be Indian."

It stuck with me a long time after I left the theatre. I think it's because I recognized those characters on the big screen.



*Jennifer Podemski, left, and Cara Gee play mother and daughter in Empire of Dirt. (Mongrel Media)*

And that's our goal with this site: we want you, our audience, to see yourselves in the stories we share.

It's a lofty goal, we know, but one we are committed to and will strive for in our coverage every day.

We are going to keep covering the news, absolutely. But we also hope to offer stories that show the richness and diversity in our lives and communities.

We're not going to shy away from the controversial issues, but we want to cover them in a way that explores the broader context.

We want to deepen the understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians and continue the conversation ... and even when we're nervous, ask the tough questions.

## **Winnipeg aboriginal women denied flight to Ottawa**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 09, 2013 12:05 PM



*Gail (right) poses with her sister Tanya Nepinak in this undated photo. (Courtesy the Nepinak family)*

A Manitoba MP is crying discrimination after two aboriginal women were not allowed to board a plane with her, even though they had tickets.

Niki Ashton, who represents the Churchill riding for the NDP, said Gail and Joyce Nepinak were scheduled to fly to Ottawa from Winnipeg with her on Sunday evening.



*MP Niki Ashton said the Nepinaks were embarrassed when they were not allowed to board the plane. (CBC)*

The Nepinaks had been invited by the House of Commons to speak at the special committee on missing and murdered indigenous women on Monday.

It is the first time the committee will hear from families.

The Nepinaks were to be one of six families testifying. Tanya Nepinak — Gail's sister and Joyce's daughter — went missing from Winnipeg in September 2011 and has never been found. She was 31.

Though her remains have not been located, police have said they believe they may be buried somewhere in the Brady Road landfill.

Winnipeg police had charged Shawn Lamb with second-degree murder in connection with Nepinak's death, but [that charge was stayed last month](#).

Gail and Joyce don't have drivers' licences or any other government-issued I.D., which is required by airlines for passengers to board.

Air Canada would not accept the Nepinaks' health cards, bank cards, their electronic boarding passes, a House of Commons invitation, or even Ashton vouching for them.

Ashton asked to speak to an Air Canada manager but one never showed up.

She said that in many ways this situation is symbolic of the systemic discrimination aboriginal people face in so many areas of their daily lives.

The Nepinaks were embarrassed, she added.

The House of Commons should share some of the blame, though, Ashton said. Officials should have made sure the Nepinaks had proper ID before the tickets were booked.

On Monday, Air Canada sent a statement to CBC News, saying it was simply following the rules.

## **Poachers kill five more elk on Vancouver Island: 13 elk in total have apparently been shot illegally near Port Alberni**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 09, 2013 7:37 AM PT



*A dead Elk is shown in this undated handout photo near Port Alberni, B.C. The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council is offering a \$25,000 reward for the prosecution of those conducting an illegal elk kill in its territory. (Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation/The Canadian Press)*

Poachers appear to have shot five more elk near Port Alberni, B.C., after the Nuu-chah-nulth tribal council first offered a \$25,000 reward last week.

On Tuesday, the tribal council made up of 14 First Nations [offered the reward for the arrest and conviction](#) of those responsible for killing eight elk.

By Friday, that toll has risen to 13 elk poached and partially butchered, with the remainder of the animals left to rot, according to The Canadian Press.

Officials with the Ministry of the Environment were not able to confirm the number of elk that had been shot.

But Larry Johnson, director of lands and natural resources for the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, says he's angry about the slaughter of a scarce animal that he's never been allowed to hunt.

The band had transplanted and protected the stock in the mid 1990s, and it had grown to the point where the bands would have been able to harvest one of the animals.

Johnson says the tips have poured in since the reward was announced, and he's convinced the poachers will eventually be caught.

"Because I think it's more than one group, due to the tips that are coming in, and it's because the unprecedented amount of money that's being offered here."

### ***Expert hunters suspected***

Johnson believes the poachers are experienced hunters because the poachers are quickly able to cut off the best cuts of meat.

"These are like expert people who know what they're doing because they aren't cleaning them like you would if you were on a normal hunt. It's like they know how to dislocate and pull off a hind quarter in seconds, minutes."

"All they're doing is making a couple of quick incisions, cutting the leg through the cartilage and where the ball joint is, one simple snip there, and the hind quarter is off."

He said in most of the recent cases the poachers have taken about 25 per cent of the meat and left the rest behind.

"A lot more people could have been fed with it. These people are taking it, selling it, something like that."

In some of the previous cases the entire animal was left in the bushes.

Johnson says it was likely the poachers were interrupted or saw a vehicle coming.

Chief Jeff Cook of the Huu-ay-aht Nation told a news conference on Tuesday that the nation is opposed to the killing of elk for sport or fun and the fact that much of the animals were left behind troubles them.

## **Jackpine Mine will destroy wetlands and wildlife, First Nations say: Mine will create \$17 billion in taxes, royalties and create 750 full time jobs, Shell says**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 09, 2013 5:00 AM ET

Angela Sterritt



*Alice Rigney, Athabasca Chipewyan FN, picking berries on Burntwood Island, Lake Athabasca. "They say oil is development and progress, but for me it's not, it's destruction." (John Rigney)*

Angela Sterritt is an award winning Gitxsan journalist and filmmaker from British Columbia who currently resides in Yellowknife NT. She is a CBC TV and radio reporter and often subs as a TV host and producer. She has worked with CBC since 2003. Sterritt is also a visual artist, mother and writer.

The largest known reservoir of crude bitumen in the world is about to get even bigger, but Alice Rigney is in no mood to celebrate.

Rigney was raised in Northern Alberta on the Athabasca River that now runs directly through multiple oil sands projects.

"That river is our lifeline and has been for thousands of years. It has always sustained us with fish, food, water and travel – everything," said Rigney.

Rigney grew up watching traditional hunting, fishing and trapping grounds transform into what she now calls the tar sands. She is now part of an Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations (ACFN) Elders council, fighting those developments.

"If they destroy that, what will become of us? Are we going to become refugees on our own land? Where am I going to go?"

### **Conservation area, compensation lake planned**

Now Shell Canada has the green light from the federal government to expand its 7,500 hectare Jackpine Mine to 13,000 hectares.



*Two children from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations at the Oilsands healing walk, 2013. (Ben Powless)*

Shell said it could bring the Alberta and federal governments an estimated \$17 billion in royalties and taxes over its life and create an additional 750 full time jobs.

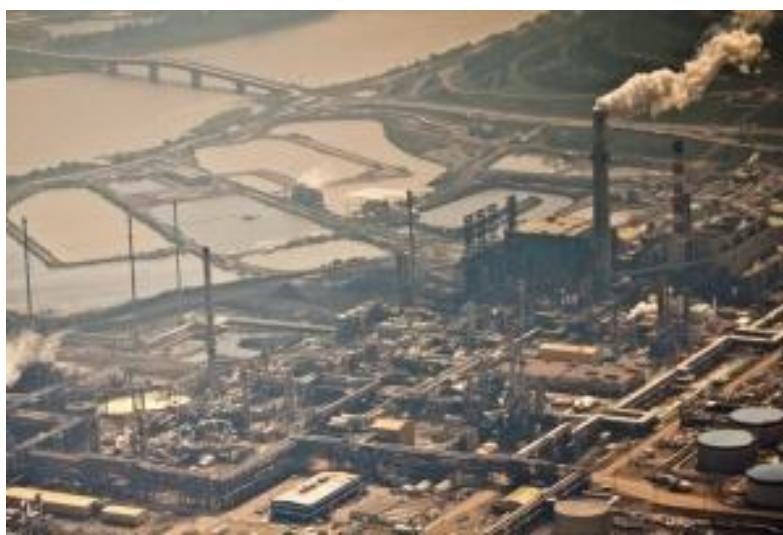
But Indigenous and environmental groups

say the predicted damage to water, land and animals outweighs any profits the addition to the oil sands will yield.

Shell's assessment projects that 185,872 hectares of wetlands in the area will be lost or altered as a result of the Jackpine Mine expansion and other industrial activity.

In order to mitigate impacts, the company has purchased about 730 hectares of former cattle pasture in northwestern Alberta to help compensate for 8,500 hectares of wetland that would be lost just from the expansion.

Shell has also drafted plans to move caribou and wood bison to a conservation offset zone. They also plan to create a compensation lake complete with fish and fauna in order to further mitigate impacts on wetlands and wildlife.



### **Plans 'open the door' for more big mines**

Suncor is one of many facilities near First Nations in Alberta. (Ben Powless)

But Shell's mitigation plans don't comfort Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Elder Pat Marcel.

"This will open the door for Suncore, Teck and Total to come in and put another big mine in the same area, Marcel said. They will not only disturb, but they will wipe out the habitat for the wood bison, the Ronald Lake Herd, and also the migratory path of the woodland caribou".

Marcel is also worried about how the expansion will impact Treaty and Dene rights. The Athabasca deposit is located within the boundaries of Treaty 8 and overlaps multiple traditional Indigenous lands of the Dene, Cree and Metis.

"ACFN has, for the longest time, fought industry and government to really set lands aside for ACFN for the practice of treaty rights", he said. "I have been pushing for 20 years now for consultation to happen. But, so far, no way".

Shell asserts they have always had significant relationships with the Indigenous people in the territories the company operates within.



*Eriel Deranger, ACFN communications representative, says Shell's consultation process is concerning. (Ben Powless)*

"There's been a lot of work done to look at the expansion, a lot of data collected and analyzed – to analyze the mine expansion itself but also more broadly the oil sands developments. That includes consultation with neighbours, community members, First Nations and other Aboriginal communities, to the degree that there is about 20,000 pages of documentation in the public hearing process," said David Williams, a Shell Canada spokesperson based in Calgary.

"The optics are that they are meaningfully consulting with Aboriginal groups, but actually they send in low level technicians who can't make decisions or tell us how the decision are going to be made," said Eriel Deranger, ACFN communications representative.

"We want to be treated as a government with real authority and rights."

The Fort McKay, Mikisew Cree, and Metis locals have also expressed concerns with the impacts the Jackpine Mine could have on the Muskeg River, and on traditional hunting, fishing and trapping grounds.

According to Shell's environmental assessment 21 kilometers of the Muskeg River would be destroyed as a result of the mine extension. For many Indigenous trappers and hunters the river is also the only means of transportation in the summer months.

"I still live on Athabasca River, Rigney said. "I still go out every chance I get. I don't drink the water, but I collect medicine, and we eat animals of the land. Who is to say that the animals don't know that the water is polluted. They drink it, and does it continue up the food chain?"

## **ACFN to take legal action: The fight to slow down or stop the massive oil sands development has been years in the making.**

[Kamloops Daily News](#)

December 8, 2013

Mike Youds

On November 8th, [Ottawa put the breaks on the project](#), granting the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation a 35-day extension.



*Shell's mitigation plans don't comfort Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Elder Pat Marcel. (Youtube)*

Friday's decision to go forward with the project didn't wait until the 35-day extension period was up.

While the lure of fast money at the oil sands is strong, Alice Rigney said she hopes young

people start to think about the future and other choices.

"There is more to life than this, that's what I tell them. You can be a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher — you don't need to go work in the oil patch. But, in the end, it's your choice," said Rigney.

"My granny used to say everything has life, everything connects and I believe in that. That is my church they are destroying, and it really hurts me to see them ripping Mother Earth's heart out and extracting what they want. Yes, I am against it. They say oil is development and progress. But, for me, it's not. It's destruction."

The ACFN has vowed to take legal action against Ottawa's decision to allow Shell to expand the Jackpine Mine oil sands project.

Federal report met with skepticism from chiefs

Lawyer looks to find grounds for conciliation on Northern Gateway pipeline



*Doug Eyford*

B.C. First Nation leaders agree with a federally commissioned report calling for constructive dialogue about energy projects, but they remain skeptical that Ottawa will follow through.

Vancouver lawyer Doug Eyford — appointed in March to find grounds for conciliation amid tense federal review hearings on the Northern Gateway pipeline — released his report Thursday.

Eyford said that trust and reconciliation must be built between governments and First Nations. He also suggested that most aboriginal communities in B.C. and Alberta see the value and economic opportunity in energy developments, but want work to be done in an environmentally sustainable way that respects their rights.

Chief Mike LeBourdais of Pell'tiq't First Nation (Whispering Pines/Clinton) was part of a teleconference with Eyford and is on side with his recommendations on issues such as revenue sharing. He's not optimistic, though.

"I can almost see the eyes rolling back in Ottawa," LeBourdais said on Friday. "This government is not proactive with First Nations. Look at Attawapiskat."

The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs responded on a similar note.

"It is clear that Mr Eyford listened to our communities as many, if not all, of his recommendations reflect the public positions and statements of many First Nations standing against Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline and Kinder Morgan's proposed expansion of their Trans Mountain pipeline," Grand Chief Stewart Phillip said in a news release.

"Unfortunately, many of his recommendations will be ignored," he said, adding that the Harper government chooses to ignore legally recognized rights and title while showing contempt for environmental values and concerns.

Chief Bob Chamberlin, UBCIC vice-president, said the federal government weakened environmental safeguards and slashed agency budgets in order to bulldoze mega-projects into existence.

"The federal government must realize 'No' as a consultative process outcome must be respected as much as 'Yes,'" he said.

LeBourdais said Ottawa could take a few pointers from Kinder Morgan, which has been negotiating with his band in good faith as it prepares to file its application for expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. The line runs through Pelit'iqt' land.

"To be honest and quite frank, our negotiations with Kinder Morgan are better than those with government," LeBourdais said. "You want to talk roadblocks, that's what government does."

Kinder Morgan had a steep learning curve, but they retained local expertise and joined the table. LeBourdais said the two parties could achieve a settlement early in the new year.

The company expects to submit its application for the \$4.5-billion project to the NEB this month. Coincidentally, the Enbridge review panel's report is due in the same time frame.

## **Community members hopeful about early work of police department's aboriginal relations unit**

[Edmonton Journal](#)

December 8, 2013

Cailynn Klingbeil



*Andrea Levey and Staff. Sgt. Dan Jones are the two staff involved with Edmonton Police Service's Aboriginal Relations Unit. The new unit, which started this summer, aims to better connect with Edmonton's growing aboriginal population. **Photograph by:** Shaughn Butts, Edmonton Journal*

EDMONTON - Staff Sgt. Dan Jones changed Kari

Thomason's perspective on police officers.

The fear many aboriginal people have of police is a feeling Thomason, a program co-ordinator at the Métis Child and Family Services Society, knows first-hand.

"Growing up, you had parents in the midst of their addiction and self pity, so their outlook on cops wasn't very positive. They passed it down to us, to be afraid of them and don't talk to them," Thomason said. "For myself, I had a big fear of them, even as an adult."

That fear lessened when Thomason met Jones through her work with the Métis Child and Family Services Society.

"He's one of those that doesn't hand over lip service. He actually puts words into action," Thomason said.

Jones is maintaining that track record in his current role with the Edmonton Police Service's new aboriginal relations unit.

The unit, launched July 29, 2013, is made up of Jones and one civilian, aboriginal relations co-ordinator Andrea Levey.

The pair are working with people like Thomason to address people's fears and start to build trust between police and the aboriginal community.

A major initiative of the unit is a training program to teach police officers about the urban aboriginal population, and there are plans for an aboriginal youth police academy and an elder council.

Jones knows some in the community hold negative feelings about police, often due to past events. Police were the people who came and took children out of their homes for residential schools, Jones said, but not everyone is aware of that past.

With Edmonton home to the second-largest urban aboriginal population in the country, trailing only Winnipeg, Jones said an aboriginal relations unit was overdue.

According to Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey, Edmonton had 41,985 people who self-identified as aboriginal, making up 5.3 per cent of the population. Edmonton's aboriginal population is projected to be the highest in the country in the next two to four years.

That population is overrepresented in corrections facilities and as victims of crimes.

Thomason hopes having a stronger voice for aboriginal people within Edmonton's police service will lead to more aborigines applying to be officers.

"We need to show people policing is more than just going out and arresting people, there's a compassionate side," Jones said. "Once we show that there's those opportunities in policing, we will increase our applicant base from a community that has historically had negative feelings about the police."

About five per cent of Edmonton Police Service officers identify as aboriginal, he said.

The unit's training program consists of a daylong course. About 90 officers took the course in late November and it is expected to reach 561 front-line members by March 2014.

The training "is about providing accurate information," said Levey, who is one-quarter Ojibwa. "Myths are a huge foundation for a lot of negative stereotypes and negativity directed at the aboriginal community. It's important that we're focused on correcting those myths."

Roy Louis, a member of the Samson Cree Nation in Hobbema, helped develop the training program.

"We want to make a better police officer when dealing with First Nations or Métis or Inuit people, that's our whole intent," Louis said.

Jones, who is white, considers himself a "strong ally" to aboriginal people.

As a correctional officer at several institutions prior to becoming a police officer, his work with members of aboriginal gangs led him to learn more about aboriginal culture.

"For lack of a better term, it became an obsession," he said.

He has since lectured nationally on aboriginal gangs.

Jones was brought in to set up the aboriginal relations unit and is now preparing to hand over the reins in mid-December to Sgt. Jason Forbes, while Levey will remain with the unit.

"I'm very hopeful we can maybe start bridging these gaps a little more, so instead of children being scared when they see a police officer that they will go to that police officer," said Sherry Fowler, a team leader at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, one of the organizations the unit has partnered with.

Four months in, Fowler said the work the unit has accomplished has her elated.

"Healing is going to come from trust and working together and co-operation, and in order for that to happen the relationships have to be built," she said.

"I think this is the first step in many to come of helping heal the past and moving forward in a good way."

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## Landmark \$120M First Nations Deal A Go

[Toronto Sun](#)

December 8, 2013

Randy Richmond



*Chief Joe Miskokomon, of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, stands at the Forks of the Thames in London, Ont. on Sunday December 8, 2013. (CRAIG GLOVER/The London Free Press)*

LONDON, Ont. -- The federal government is set to sign a \$120-million land claim settlement Monday that will launch an ambitious and novel effort - an urban reserve in London - to boost southwestern Ontario's economy.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt is to join Chief Joe Miskokomon at the Chippewa of the Thames First Nation community centre Monday to celebrate the settlement.

With the federal approval in hand, the Chippewas can begin in earnest negotiations with the city of London and other partners to create a commercial/industrial zone along Hwy. 401.

"The city of London needs economic stimulus and I think we could be a participant in that," Miskokomon said.

The urban reserve would allow companies to get in on tax advantages and federal programs provided to First Nations, and provide jobs and investment for London.

In exchange, the Chippewas would get services and other support from the city.

"We've had several conversations with the mayor (Joe Fontana) about partnering and he's very enthusiastic about that," Miskokomon said. "He wants the same things that we want. People want jobs, good jobs."

The band voted 1,200 to 101 in March in favour of the settlement and has been anxious to get moving on economic development, Miskokomon said.

In return for surrendering a claim on 5,120 acres near Big Bear Creek, the Chippewas gained not only the money but the right to buy 2,017 hectares of land in four communities, anywhere they want, from Windsor, Ont., to Woodstock, Ont.

Of the settlement money, the band is putting \$60 million toward monthly income support for its elderly members, \$10 million for post-secondary bursaries, \$20 million to be divided among adult members, and \$30 million for community and economic development.

## **Assembly of First Nations National Chief Atleo Traveling to South Africa to Participate in Memorial Services for 'Madiba' Nelson Mandela**

[Canada NewsWire](#)

OTTAWA, Dec. 8, 2013

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo announced today that he will attend memorial services in Johannesburg, South Africa on Monday December 9 and Tuesday December 10. The National Chief will travel as part of the official delegation from Canada.

"The life, work and spirit of Nelson Mandela - or Madiba, as he was called by his people - was deeply connected to First Nations in Canada not only as a fellow Indigenous leader but also because of his incredible struggle for justice and reconciliation that resonates so deeply with the struggle and aspirations of our peoples," said National Chief Atleo. "Our traditions call upon us to always be mindful of the importance of such commemoration, celebration and respect to be shown to the family and to the people united in marking this loss. I will travel to South Africa as a humble representative of our Indigenous traditions to pay our respects and to stand in honour of this great leader and inspiration for Indigenous peoples and for the world."

The National Chief is traveling to the memorial with the full support of the AFN Executive and the Elders, Women's and Youth Councils. The AFN Executive and First Nations from across the country will be gathering in Gatineau, Quebec for the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly taking place December 10-12. The National Chief will provide an Opening Address to the Assembly through video message and is expected to return to the Assembly on December 12.

"First Nations in Canada have honoured Madiba many times during his life as an example and inspiration for our work in our traditional territories," said National Chief Atleo. "Our work and our fight continues. In Mandela we see that the spirit of our peoples can never be broken and that the drive for change can be achieved by believing in our people and our rights and remaining steadfast in our resolve for reconciliation and justice. I have been to South Africa, I have seen his jail cell on Robin Island and I will be meeting with officials from the African National Congress during this trip to talk about our common issues and the way forward. I will convey greetings, condolences and solidarity on behalf of all First Nations."

Nelson Mandela passed away December 5 at the age of 95.

The Assembly of First Nations is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada. Follow AFN on Twitter @AFN\_Comms, @AFN\_Updates.

SOURCE Assembly of First Nations

## **First Nations split over Site C dam: Some want to fight the BC Hydro megaproject; other want to negotiate for millions in compensation**

[Vancouver Sun](#)

December 9, 2013

Larry Pynn

BC Hydro's planned \$7.9-billion Site C dam has caused a split among Treaty 8 First Nations over whether to fight the megaproject tooth and nail or participate in negotiations leading to compensation settlements.

As a joint review panel begins an environmental review of Site C today on behalf of the provincial and federal governments, four First Nations communities have banded together to fight the project - Doig River, Halfway River, Prophet River, and West Moberly.

"We don't want it," Doig councillor Kelvin Davis told The Vancouver Sun during a tour of traditional sites along the Peace River. "The land is more valuable to us the way it is. For this to be under water is unthinkable."

Three other Treaty 8 First Nations - Blueberry River, Saulneau, and McLeod Lake - have agreed to negotiate for compensation and have been offered "impact benefit agreements," confirmed Dave Conway, BC Hydro community relations manager in Fort St. John.

"BC Hydro remains prepared to enter into discussions with the four remaining First Nations," he said.

Asked how he felt about the split, Davis replied: "I really don't want to go there. That's the other First Nations' business."

Impact benefit agreements are for First Nations whose "treaty rights may be adversely affected by the project in ways that cannot be fully avoided or otherwise mitigated," Conway added. Compensation could involve money, land, employment and contracting of work.

BC Hydro agreements in recent years with two other native groups over historic damages associated with the W.A.C. Bennett dam, built in 1967, and the Williston reservoir hint at the sort of settlements that might be possible downstream on the Peace River at Site C. In a 2009 agreement, the Tsay Keh Dene received a onetime payment of \$20.9 million - most of which was to be placed in an endowment fund - and annual payments of about \$2 million to support a wide range of social, cultural and governance programs.

Other benefits include "direct award contracting opportunities," assurances regarding annual road maintenance and capacity funding to allow the community to engage in discussions regarding impacts of new BC Hydro projects on the community.

In 2008, the Kwadacha First Nation received a onetime payment of \$15 million and annual payments of \$1.6 million. In both cases, the settlements followed legal action by the First Nations.

With aborigines holding a powerful position on resource development in B.C., are such payments an attempt to buy their support?

"If it's all negative impact to them, I don't think I'd be supporting the project either," Bill Bennett, Minister of Energy and Mines, responded in an interview. "All we're trying to do is put them in a position where because they're going to be impacted, they'll have an opportunity to derive benefits from the project." BC Hydro's mandate is to make sure all communities affected - but particularly First Nations - are in some way compensated or get a share of the benefits, he said.

"That's something we're working hard on with the Treaty 8 First Nations. What you hope for, over time, is that they see the project doesn't have all the negative environmental impacts they think it might have."

Among the compensation touted for non-native communities with the Peace River Regional District is a legacy fund that would pay the district \$2.4 million a year, indexed to inflation over 70 years, once the dam starts generating electricity.

BC Hydro is seeking to build a 1,100-megawatt dam that would flood 83 kilometres of the Peace River from almost Fort St. John upriver to Hudson's Hope. The dam would be 1,050 metres long and 60 metres high and would also flood 14 kilometres of the Halfway River and 10 kilometres of the Moberly River.

Natives in the Peace country were nomadic - unlike coastal First Nations with their longhouses - and gravesites are strewn throughout the valley. But there are also traditional sites such as Bear Flat where they came time and again in summer to hunt and harvest; once they had a food supply, including fattened black bears before hibernation, they would move back into the bush to their trapping areas.

The Doig reserve, with about 300 members, is about an hour's drive to the northwest but that does not mean they don't use the Peace River.

"We enjoy this valley every year," said Davis, wearing a beaver hat to protect his head from -20 C weather. "We know this region and what's best for it. Site C is the wrong option and not needed for B.C."

The Doig people host an elder and youth gathering at Bear Flat annually as a way to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation, and the West Moberly also has an annual sweat lodge in the area.

On the banks of the Halfway River, near its confluence with the Peace, Robert Dominic, a member of the Doig elders' council, pointed to some willows and noted that his people have traditionally harvested and dried the bark, then smoked it in rolling papers. "For your health," he said, waving off any suggestion of hallucinogenic properties. "Pure medicinal tobacco."

Davis looked up towards a grassy south-facing slope where the remains of Doig Chief Peter Attachie - one of the signatories to Treaty 8, which was negotiated in 1899 and included hunting rights - are buried on private farmland. "We still practice our rights, still hunt and gather in this valley. Nothing has changed in our culture and traditions."

If the dam is approved, Davis said he is prepared to step in front of bulldozers to stop construction. "We'll have to do civil disobedience, I guess."

Roland Willson, chief of the West Moberly First Nation, has also told The Sun, "We'll go to court if we have to," to protect one of the last best places in a region dominated by resource development.

A report by the David Suzuki Foundation and Global Forest Watch Canada one year ago calculated there are 28,587 kilometres of pipelines, 45,293 kilometres of roads, and 116,725 kilometres of seismic lines used for oil and gas exploration within the Peace region.

Laid end to end, all those roads, pipelines and seismic lines would circle the Earth nearly five times, the report found.

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## **Alberta government forms two councils to address concerns of aboriginal women**

[Edmonton Sun](#)

December 9, 2013

Matt Dykstra

The provincial government is aiming to prioritize the social and economic concerns of aboriginal women in Alberta with the formation of two new advisory councils.

Announced by outgoing Aboriginal Relations Minister Robin Campbell on Monday, the new First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Metis Women's Economic Security Council will make recommendations on ways to "improve economic outcomes for aboriginal women."

"If we don't move quickly, we're about to lose another generation of children in this province and that's unacceptable," said Campbell. "The councils will be able to identify the challenges aboriginal women face in Alberta and will provide advice on how we can work with communities to overcome these barriers."

Campbell said the work will hopefully result in a set of defined government priorities and recommendations by late spring 2014. After initial recommendations, the ministry will begin working with other areas of government to examine what training or education programs are available to address the issues.

Koren Lightning-Earle, a Samson Cree Nation councillor and co-chair of the 23-member First Nations council, said the group initially met in September and will continue to meet roughly twice a year.

Preliminary discussions touched on aboriginal children in care, job opportunities, adequate housing, investigations into murdered and missing aboriginal women, poverty, discrimination and access to justice system, said Lightning-Earle.

"So we've talked about a lot of the issues and now our next step when we meet in the new year will be to discuss what are our priorities," said Lightning-Earle.

As the co-chair of the 13-member Metis Women's Economic Security Council, Rachelle Venne said isolation, discrimination and poverty are the biggest barriers for aboriginal women in Alberta.

The councils will be given a budget in the Aboriginal Relations ministry and work under Frank Oberle, announced as the new Minister of Aboriginal Relations in last week's cabinet shuffle by Premier Alison Redford.

## **AANDC not meeting Aboriginal workforce promise: former employees**

[APTN National News](#)

December 9, 2013

Josh Grummett

Two former employees of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada say the department is nowhere near meeting its mandate of hiring a 50 per cent Aboriginal workforce.

Jonah Keeshig and Fred McGregor also told *APTN Investigates* that the mandate itself is a taboo topic at AANDC headquarters.

Jonah Keeshig worked for Aboriginal Affairs as a registration officer in its Adoptions office, helping adopted children get their Indian status. He was part of a group of 16 Indigenous employees hired as part of a recruitment drive in 2008. All 16 were dismissed in 2011, mere weeks before they would have become permanent employees. At the time of their dismissal they were working to address a backlog in the processing of status card applications.

"When we were first hired, it was for one year," says Keeshig. "They kept us on for another year. When it came down to the end of that, they said, 'No, no, we're still in a backlog, we still need you.' So they hired us again.

"Now if they keep doing that past the three-year mark, you're permanent," he continued. "You ain't going anywhere. And basically, that's what we were all looking for. We all had families."

Keeshig was an executive member of CANE, the Committee for Advancing Native Employment, when he was employed by AANDC. He says that the process of their termination started with some internal testing that took place a few months before they were fired.

"They wanted to do an examination," says Keeshig, "If we passed that exam, then we could continue on working."

He says the process was announced in December of 2010, and the exams took place in January and February of 2011. All members of the group of 16 Indigenous employees who would later be terminated took the exams.

"We were led to believe by management that they would keep us," Keeshig said. "Even regardless of the exams that were going on, they always kept saying, 'Don't worry about it, it's all good, just write the exam and you're going to become permanent.'"

Keeshig believes that his marks may have had nothing to do with his dismissal. During a meeting with HR in which he challenged his results, Keeshig says "the marker from HR said, 'Well you answered everything right. It just wasn't what we were looking for.'"

That comment, along with allegations of cheating and favouritism that were beginning to circulate, was the writing on the wall for Keeshig.

"That's when we started suspecting that we were not going to be extended," he says.

Shortly before their term ended in March of 2011, they were extended for just one month, and dismissed at the end of April. None of the 16 term employees had reached the point where they would be considered a permanent employee.

As *APTN Investigates* revealed in its November 29, 2013 episode, those 16 employees were replaced by 75 employees from Service Canada who had no experience with Indian status card registration and did not have the proper security clearance to access the Indian Registry System, causing already existing delays in status card processing to skyrocket. ([Watch the full episode here.](#))

Fred McGregor was Keeshig's co-worker, employed in AANDC's Entitlements office, which handled the bulk of status card applications. He says that when he was there, the mandate to have a 50 per cent Aboriginal workforce was a taboo topic around the office.

"No one was listening to that," says McGregor. "No one wanted to hear that. No one in the public service. When we were out, that was brought up after the fact. But

when [the 16 Indigenous term employees were still employed], nobody wanted to discuss that."

McGregor worries that there will be little to no accountability for the disastrous decision to let him and his co-workers go, saying that "everyone in this situation has either retired or left. It's no skin off their back."

Eight of the employees launched a grievance with AANDC over their dismissal. According to e-mails provided by Keeshig, the Union of National Employees dropped the grievance in late 2012, stating that they had found no wrongdoing.

AANDC's commitment to work towards hiring a 50 per cent Aboriginal work force dates back to November 22, 1996. On that day, the department signed a letter of understanding with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs stating that AANDC "*has a long term objective of having a majority of DIAND employees with Aboriginal ancestry*" and "*will make every reasonable effort to reach... a 50 per cent hiring share for Aboriginal peoples.*"

Keeshig says that today, AANDC is nowhere near that total.

"With all of us [the group of 16 Indigenous term employees] hired, we were at 29 or 30 per cent," says Keeshig. "And then, when they let us go, I don't know what it went down to."

When asked about the number of Indigenous employees at the department, as well as Keeshig and McGregor's claims, AANDC did not respond directly. Instead, they later released a short statement saying that due to privacy laws, they are unable to divulge employees' personal information, and that government firing policies were respected.

While AANDC did affirm that they are committed to hiring indigenous employees to "increase their representation", they did not release the number of current Indigenous employees, and their statement made no mention of their letter of understanding with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

## **Canada World Youth and the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI offer Aboriginal young people a national dialogue on issues and priorities**

By [Canada World Youth](#)

Published: Monday, Dec. 9, 2013 - 9:00 am

MONTREAL, Dec. 9, 2013 -- /CNW Telbec/ - Rita S. Karakas, President and Chief Executive Officer of [Canada World Youth](#) (CWY), and Sandra Gaudet, Executive Director of the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI), signed a memorandum of understanding to co-host a national Aboriginal youth symposium,

"Aboriginal Youth and Confederation: Learning From the Past & Building For the Future" in Charlottetown, to be held in Prince Edward Island on June 26-28, 2014. The symposium provides Aboriginal young people from across Canada with the opportunity to identify and prioritize their needs, issues and ideas in the context of Confederation and its impacts on Aboriginal people in the past, present and future.

"This symposium will enable Aboriginal youth to identifying specific needs in skill development and educational interests from the various programs offered by CWY over the past 40 years, explains Rita S. Karakas.

According to Sandra Gaudet, "Both of our organizations are committed to supporting the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal youth to play leadership roles in their communities and increase their involvement in the roles and issues that are important to them."

The MOU provides a framework for cooperation by which CWY and MCPEI will work closely to advance the Project and its objectives as follows:

- Provide a forum for Aboriginal young people to share information about the contemporary significance of Confederation.
- Generate ideas for addressing specific challenges facing Aboriginal young people across Canada.
- Create formal and informal networks to assist Aboriginal young people across the country with the development of a 'National Framework'.

#### **About CWY ([www.canadaworldyouth.org](http://www.canadaworldyouth.org))**

Founded in 1971, CWY is a leader in developing leadership, health and environment oriented international education programs for young people aged 15 to 35. A non-profit organization, Canada World Youth is dedicated to enriching the lives of young people who have a desire to become informed and active global citizens.

CWY is registered with the [Canada Revenue Agency](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca) as a charitable organization (118973999RR0001).

#### **About MCPEI ([www.mcpei.ca](http://www.mcpei.ca))**

The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI is a not-for-profit Tribal Council and Provincial Territorial Organization. MCPEI builds relationships with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders; conducts research; advises on policy issues; develops and implements collaborative initiatives; and provides direct services and support to First Nations people.

SOURCE Canada World Youth

## **Neil Young to perform shows in benefit of Alberta First Nations fighting oil sands**

[The Globe and Mail](#)

Dec. 09 2013, 12:38 PM EST

Brad Wheeler



*Money raised from the concert will go to a legal defense fund set up to support the ACFN's legal challenges against oil companies and government bodies, and to uphold rights related to Treaty 8, an agreement signed in 1899 between Queen Victoria and various First Nations bands of Alberta. (HANS PENNINK/THE CANADIAN PRESS)*

Neil Young, the often antagonizing singer-songwriter who wrote the surreal ballad *Pocahontas* and who named one of his bands after an iconic Native American warrior, has announced he will perform four concerts in benefit of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN).

The performances, which include appearances by the jazz chanteuse Diana Krall, are to be known as the "[Honor the Treaties](#)" shows. Concerts will happen at Toronto's Massey Hall (Jan. 12), Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall (Jan. 16), Regina's Conexus Arts Centre (Jan. 17) and Calgary's Jack Singer Concert Hall (Jan. 19).

Tickets for the four concerts go on sale Friday, Dec. 13, through Ticketmaster. Seats range in price between \$55 and \$250.

Money raised will go to a legal defense fund set up to support the ACFN's legal challenges against oil companies and government bodies, and to uphold rights related to Treaty 8, an agreement signed in 1899 between Queen Victoria and various First Nations bands of Alberta. Shell Canada was recently given the green

light from Ottawa to expand its 7,500 hectare Jackpine oil sands mine to 13,000 hectares. Indigenous and environmental groups foresee damage to the area's water, land and animals.

In September, Young waded into the heated debate over the oil sands and the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, warning of the health effects on First Nations peoples and the "wasteland" that is Fort McMurray, Alta. The California-based Canadian rocker was at a National Farmers Union event on Capitol Hill meant to support alternative fuels, such as ethanol, which he did at length, slamming Big Oil and talked about his own LincVolt, an old Continental that runs on ethanol and electricity.

About the oil sands, Young controversially said this:

"The fact is, Fort McMurray looks like Hiroshima. Fort McMurray is a wasteland. The Indians up there and the native peoples are dying. The fuels all over – the fumes everywhere – you can smell it when you get to town. The closest place to Fort McMurray that is doing the tar sands work is 25 or 30 miles out of town and you can taste it when you get to Fort McMurray. People are sick. People are dying of cancer because of this. All the First Nations people up there are threatened by this."

More recently, Young, who penned protest songs *Ohio* and *Rockin' in the Free World* and whose 2012 autobiography is titled *Waging Heavy Peace*, took to [neilyoung.com](http://neilyoung.com) to deliver politically charged eco-missives directed at the Canadian government – "Harper's Conservatives now compete with Australia's pro-coal government for the worst climate record in the industrialized world" – and China. "Whenever you do something good in the war against CO2, people around the world benefit," Young wrote, in response to record levels of air pollution that recently shrouded China's smoggy commercial hub of Shanghai.

In related news, Young and his grunge-rock compadres Crazy Horse were revealed as headliners for a concert to be held in London's Hyde Park on July 12, 2014. The festival will include appearances from the National and Caitlin Rose. And, as previously announced, a four-show run by Young (sans Crazy Horse) is set for New York's Carnegie Hall next month (Jan. 6, 7, 9 and 10).

*With files from Michael Babad*

## **Folly to neglect First Nations**

[The StarPhoenix](http://www.thestarphoenix.com)

December 9, 2013

An Ottawa-commissioned report released this week by Vancouver lawyer Doug Eyford not only is an indictment of government-aboriginal relations of the past, but

it serves as a warning for Saskatchewan to tread much more carefully in developing its resource industry.

Considered in conjunction with a New York Times story about the changed attitude toward carbon taxes by the world's biggest oil companies, the report by Mr. Eyford, who was appointed this year as Canada's special federal representative on West Coast energy infrastructure, joins a growing body of evidence on how much politics in Canada has put the country on the wrong side of history.

His report, *Forging Partnerships, Building Relationships*, states that "aboriginal communities hold constitutionally protected rights" which must be respected. Otherwise projects could be delayed or cancelled, he writes.

Although he deals specifically with Alberta and British Columbia, Mr. Eyford's observations on aboriginal attitudes to development and the environment reflect closely what First Nations from Saskatchewan to New Brunswick have been saying.

His report was released on the day that Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne met with Prime Minister Stephen Harper to discuss similar concerns regarding the development of the Ring of Fire area 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay that contains an estimated \$60 billion in minerals. That development will affect several First Nations and requires a multiparty agreement among companies, governments and aboriginal bands to build the infrastructure and provide the labour.

According to a study by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy, getting such a deal will require rebuilding trust with aboriginal groups who are leery after years of neglect and bad politics. The school found a great lack of confidence in the trustworthiness of governments and companies on protecting the rights of First Nations.

Governments may believe they can neglect First Nations because of their relative size compared to the rest of Canada, but to get on the wrong side of the moral argument provides greater legitimacy to other groups who are willing to ally themselves with the perceived victims as a way to sway public opinion. That's a reason why we see Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union, allying itself with First Nations to oppose the Northern Gateway pipeline.

If the Saskatchewan Party continues to use resource revenue sharing with First Nations as a political stick to beat up the NDP, it will sour relationships in this province, too.

Similarly, relationships with industry can be damaged if Canada's conservative parties continue to attack the idea of a carbon tax, or a cap-and-trade system.

The New York Times reports that more than two dozen of America's biggest corporations, including the five major oil companies, already are planning for a carbon tax of about \$60 a tonne, believing that a tax is a more economically efficient way to deal with the cost of carbon than the higher hidden costs that accrue from stricter regulation.

Unless governments are willing to put aside partisan politics and adopt evidence-based policy development, the opportunities Mr. Eyford identifies will go unrealized.

The editorials that appear in this space represent the opinion of The StarPhoenix. They are unsigned because they do not necessarily represent the personal views of the writers. The positions taken in the editorials are arrived at through discussion among the members of the newspaper's editorial board, which operates independently from the news departments of the paper.

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## **Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs slashed by \$2M funding cut**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 10, 2013 1:54 PM ET



*Grand Chief Derek Nepinak, front, of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs meets up with protesters as they march from Victoria Island to Parliament Hill on Jan. 11. (Patrick Doyle/Canadian Press)*

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, already operating with half its normal staff, says it has less than four months to figure out how to keep the organization afloat.

In April, the full extent of Ottawa's cut to AMC's core funding will be felt, with budgets chopped by 80 per cent from \$2.5 million to \$500,000 per year.

'They said 'you are going to toe the line with our policy objectives or things are going to get quiet in Manitoba' '- *Grand Chief Derek Nepinak*

Grand Chief Derek Nepinak says that amount of money will basically just keep the lights on.

Nepinak said when he was first elected in 2011, he was given a warning from the federal Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Department.

"They said, 'You are going to toe the line with our policy objectives or things are going to get quiet in Manitoba,'" Nepinak said.

"I think that was unfortunately the plan — to really silence the voice of First Nations people."

The federal department says it made the changes so funding will be more equal across the board.

Nepinak has been [one of Manitoba's most outspoken grand chiefs](#). Over the past year, he has also been a loud voice in the Idle No More movement.

In September 2012, when the federal funding cut was announced, the AMC had a staff of 75 people. Now it's down to less than half that number.

The grand chief's inner circle of policy makers originally had 27 people, but it will shrink to 11.

### **Quieting the Aboriginal voice?**

Nepinak said with those people gone, it will now be next to impossible to provide political advocacy on First Nations issues. AMC will have to pick and choose its battles with the government, he added.



*Leah Gazan says the funding cuts have less to do with equity and everything to do with quieting the aboriginal voice. (CBC)*

Educator and Idle No More activist Leah Gazan says she believes these cuts have less to do with funding equity and everything to do with quieting the aboriginal voice.

"I think Stephen Harper has a strategic plan in place," she said, pointing to federal bills pushed through government that she said threaten the environment and First Nations' treaty rights.

Gazan said she believes the prime minister is feeling threatened because people are standing up to his corporate and resource development agendas.

"If you don't abide by that, if you don't play into that, then he cuts you off at the knees," she said.

## **5 fast facts about the cuts affecting Aboriginal political groups in Canada**

- Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) funds five national, 40 Regional Aboriginal Organizations (RPOs) and 78 Tribal Councils.
- By April 2014, all will see either a 10 percent cut or a \$500 thousand cap applied to its funding
- Prior to the cut, AANDC spent \$28,246,787 annually funding 45 organizations. Starting in April, that figure drops by \$7 million.
- In Manitoba, there are four Aboriginal Representative Organizations (ARO) and seven Tribal Councils. Manitoba's four AROs received more funding than any other province at a total of \$5,478,000 annually.
- The AMC was the second-highest funded in the country, after the Assembly of First Nations. In comparison, Ontario's AROs received \$2,137,065 in annual funding for seven organizations.

Manitoba's former grand chief, Ron Evans, says he doesn't believe Nepinak has been targeted, as funding cuts are happening across the board.



*Norway House Cree Nation Chief Ron Evans says Nepinak is pushing his own agenda rather than doing the job he was elected to do. (CBC)*

"When I was there and other previous leaders, we expressed our opposition to things that the governments were doing, things we didn't agree with," said Evans. "We protested, but we didn't experience anything because of that."

Evans, who is chief of the Norway House Cree Nation, said Nepinak is pushing his own agenda rather than doing the job he was elected to do. He is concerned about how the cuts will affect the 61 First Nations that AMC represents.

The chiefs get together several times a year to implement strategies and work to change provincial and federal policies. Evans said that's what keeps the organization strong.

"When you diminish that, it weakens the organization to the point where it becomes very ineffective," he said.

While Gazan acknowledges the capped funding will impact the organization, she believes the AMC will survive.

"I think it's how you choose to spend money," she said. "I mean, we can keep feeding the monster that was put in place to destroy us, or we can use the money to build really strong, healthy communities."

"Come April 1, 2014, we are going to be down even more because that's when the major cut kicks in," said Nepinak. "We have to figure out operating budgets within the very limited resources we are going to have."

Nepinak is in power until July 2014, when the AMC holds elections for grand chief.

## **Health course helps Inuit interpreters tackle tough jobs**

[Canadian Medical Association Journal](http://www.cmaj.ca)

December 11, 2013



*Dr. Véronique Morin gives a medical lesson to interpreters Maggie Tooktoo, Lizzie Charlie and Laly Saviadjuk.*  
Photo Credit: François Prévost

One of interpreter Maggie Tooktoo's hardest tasks when working with doctors, nurses and Inuit patients in remote James Bay communities in Nunavik, Quebec, is to deliver bad news to community members about their health.

"Sometimes it's difficult when you have a patient who is your relative and you have to try to tell them that they have cancer, and maybe it's not treatable," says Tooktoo, who has been interpreting for medical professionals in the community of Kuujjuarapik for the past eight years.

After taking a health education course with other interpreters last spring, however, Tooktoo is confident that the strategies she learned and the information she now possesses will help her tackle even the most difficult aspects of her job.

"It helped me to be more open as to when a patient has cancer, and how to approach that," says Tooktoo, reached by telephone at a nursing station in Kuujjuarapik, a remote fly-in community located at the mouth of the Great Whale River. "They taught us how to have someone else with us — maybe a family member" when breaking the news.

The week-long course at the Nunavimmi Pigiusavik adult school in Inukjuak, Quebec, was a pilot project that included lessons about ethics, patients' rights, physiopathology and information about chronic diseases. It was taught by Dr. Véronique Morin and several colleagues. The project arose from informal training Morin used to give her interpreters whenever she had time between patients, while working in communities along the east coast of James Bay.

"I realized there was a lot of interest on their part to learn about the way diseases arise," says Morin, a family doctor who lives in Inukjuak and Montréal, Quebec.

Morin also realized that although the 30 interpreters who work on the east coast of Hudson Bay are hired to interpret between health care professionals and patients, they are asked, informally, to do much more. As trusted community members, the interpreters are viewed as repositories of medical knowledge. Their peers, including friends and relatives, seek them out when sick or when they have basic health questions.

"Some interpreters are trusted more than some of the white staff, who are not culturally competent," Morin adds.

Unlike doctors, who often fly in and out, the interpreters are accessible 24 hours a day, since they live in the same community. People stop them on the street or at the grocery store to ask about ailments, or call the clinic to ask interpreters why they have an appointment with a specialist. Often, patients express fear or say they don't want to go for a colonoscopy, or that they can't go because they don't have a babysitter.

"It's the interpreter who will convince them that it's worth going, or not," says Morin.

So Morin decided to take advantage of the positions of trust the interpreters occupy. Communication issues are the main reason for patient dissatisfaction with health

care in Nunavik, she points out, based on a recent report entitled *Quality Criteria for Health Care and Social Services for the Inuit People of Hudson Bay*. The report concluded that "Interpreters are at the heart of the [health care] exchange; they must receive better training to understand adequately the content of what they have to explain, and become more actively involved in the exchange."

Morin hopes Quebec's Ministry of Health or the regional Inuulitsivik Health Centre will provide funding to continue the project and to expand it to train the remaining interpreters in the seven Inuit communities on the coast.

"As doctors, we know it's hard to explain concepts to a patient and the retention rate is generally pretty low, even in an encounter that's not transcultural," says Morin. "So in a transcultural encounter, when the information goes through an interpreter, we need the interpreter to understand the information in order to translate it right, to hope for some understanding from the patient."

Morin believes the training will not only improve the interpreters' confidence and job satisfaction, but will also result in culturally appropriate health care that empowers community members to become more aware and responsible for their own health.

So far, Tooktoo is feeling more confident and better able to help her patients, especially elders and the younger generation, she says. It's not uncommon for her to get a call at home, in the middle of the night.

"They might say 'Why do I feel tired? Why do I feel bloated? Why do I feel like I want to faint? Why do I have pain?' says Tooktoo.

If it's serious, she directs patients to the nursing station. But now, thanks to the mannequin that the doctors used to help explain basic anatomy, she is also better able to assess the location of a patient's pain and explain it to the doctor or nurses.

"They showed us how to tell, if a patient is not able to say what or where their pain is, how we could tell if it could be sore muscles, it could be heart problems or it could be all kinds of medical things," she says. "The more I learn, the better I can deal with patients and the more I can translate even better."

## **Alberta concerned with B.C. hydro proposal**

[Brampton Guardian](#)

December 11, 2013

Dene Moore

FORT ST. JOHN, B.C. - The province of Alberta is concerned that a multibillion-dollar hydroelectric dam proposed in northeastern British Columbia could increase mercury levels in fish and escalate the risk of floods or drought along the Peace River that flows through its province.

Alberta's Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, which manages lands, forests, fish and wildlife in the province, has filed a 23-page submission setting out its concerns to the panel reviewing the massive project.

Environmental review hearings for the \$7.9-billion Site C dam proposal by BC Hydro are underway in Fort St. John, B.C.

Two existing dams on the Peace River in B.C. have already significantly altered the flow of the river into the neighbouring province, the Alberta submission said, and this has both positive and negative impacts in Alberta.

"Alberta is concerned that Site C will further exacerbate the negative impacts," said the document filed Nov. 29.

The Site C dam would flood an 83-kilometre stretch of the Peace River from approximately Fort St. John to just upstream of Hudson's Hope. It would be the third dam on the river, downstream from the W.A.C. Bennett and Peace Canyon dams.

The two existing dams already lower the river's natural flow from May to late July, and increase flow from mid-October to mid-April. There are benefits to the flow regulation from BC Hydro, such as a reduced risk of flooding, but there are also risks, Alberta said.

Among those risks is an expected increase in methylmercury levels in fish during construction of the dam.

"Alberta acknowledges that BC Hydro expects increases in MeHg levels in fish populations downstream of the Alberta-B.C. border to be temporary and within fish consumption guidelines," the submission said.

"However, it is unclear whether Albertans are aware of this increase, the amount of the increase, and the duration of the impact."

The Alberta government requested ongoing information from BC Hydro to enable the province to inform fishermen on the Peace River of changes to methylmercury levels in fish until concentrations return to pre-construction levels.

The impact of the dam on managing ice-related flooding and concern about minimum flow rates during construction were also singled out as concerns. Reduced peak flow affects the aquatic ecosystem on the Peace River, the Peace-Athabasca delta and other riparian wetlands, the document said.

Water fluctuations also cause mortality to fish and eggs by stranding, or indirectly through increased stress on fish, the report said.

There are also concerns about changes Site C will cause in water temperature downstream from the dam and reservoir, making the Peace River slower to warm in spring and slower to cool in summer.

"Such changes to water temperatures, though slight, may impact the current distribution and range of cold and cool water fish species within Alberta causing potential declines in some species and increases in others," the report said.

"Temperature changes may also impact the timing of ice freeze-up and break-up events."

That could result in changes to spawning runs, in egg incubation rates and access to spawning habitat, the submission stated.

The province is also concerned about the flow of fish in the river.

"Upstream and downstream movement of fish populations is necessary for gene flow and hence long term resiliency in those populations, as well as to allow access to spawning, rearing, feeding, and overwintering areas," the report said.

BC Hydro has told the neighbouring province that it is exploring options for fish passage, but as yet, "Site C could result in more restrictive fishing opportunities for species Albertans value more highly in the Peace River."

Parks Canada has also expressed concern about the cumulative effects another B.C. hydroelectric dam could have downstream, on Wood Buffalo National Park and the Peace Athabasca Delta.

The federal agency said the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Fort Chipewyan Métis Association, Little Red River Cree Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation share those concerns. The Athabasca Cree, Dene Tha', Mikisew Cree and Deninu Kue First Nations, as well as the Metis Nation of Alberta Region 6, have registered to appear before the panel.

"It is Parks Canada's view that assessment of the operational phase of Site C must include consideration of the impacts of sustained, ongoing operations of all three Peace River dams managed by BC Hydro to ensure adequate assessment and consideration of the cumulative effects of flow regulation," Parks Canada wrote to the panel.

## **Donations help fund probe into suicide crisis**

[Cochrane Times Post](#)

December 11, 2013 8:51:34 EST AM

Ashley Lewis



Cochrane Mayor Peter Politis, from left, Elder commissioner Jackie Fletcher, lead commissioner Mike Metatawabin, and People's Inquiry co-ordinator Nellie Trapper attended the press conference where Fletcher announced a \$2,232 donation to the inquiry from the Echoes Drum Festival in Sault Ste. Marie.

COCHRANE - In September the Mushkegowuk First Nations announced they would be launching their own People's Inquiry to address the suicide crisis that is facing their communities after receiving no government support.

Over a three-year period from 2009-11 it is estimated that approximately 600 youth and other community members experienced suicide ideation and many youth actually ended their lives.

At a summit in 2010 the Mushkegowuk First Nations decided to develop an inquiry into the causes of the suicide and how they can be addressed.

Four community members were selected to be commissioners for the inquiry. The lead commissioner is Mike Metatawabin, from Fort Albany First Nation. The Elder commissioner is Jackie Fletcher from Missanabie Cree First Nation. The youth commissioner is Helen Kataquapit from Attawapiskat First Nation and the health and social commissioner is Dorinda Vincent from Moose Cree First Nation. They also hired Nellie Trapper from Moose Cree First Nation as the inquiry's co-ordinator.

Taykwa Tagamou Nation (TTN) is one of the seven Mushkegowuk First Nations and the commissioners were in Cochrane recently to hold hearings with the local First Nations people.

The First Nations raised \$226,000 from their communities and corporate donations, but they still fall \$46,885 short in their inquiry budget.

At the conference, Fletcher announced that the Echoes Drum Festival Committee in Sault Ste. Marie would be donating \$2232.26 to the People's Inquiry.

The Mushkegowuk Council always provided the festival with monetary support but after their final festival in September 2012 the committee had a surplus. They decided to donate that excess money to the People's Inquiry.

"Mushkegowuk helped us out in the beginning and now we're helping them out," said Fletcher from Missanabie Cree First Nation.

"What goes around comes around."

The purpose of the inquiry is to address the issue of suicide in the First Nation communities.

"It's an issue that affects us all throughout the land," said Metatawabin.

Trapper explained the hearings are part of a healing process.

"A lot of our people are still grieving over the loss of their loved ones," said Trapper.

"It's part of their healing by sharing their story."

In Moose Factory only six people registered to speak at the public hearings. But by the end of the hearings 28 people came forward and shared their story.

"You need to get that out, it has to come out from your heart," said Fletcher.

Through the public hearings the commissioners are hoping to find the root causes of the suicide pandemic in First Nation communities. In their final report they'd like to identify ways to reduce or eliminate the pandemic and present short, medium and long term solutions and recommendations.

So far the commissioners have held public hearings with the TTN, Moose Cree, and Missanabie Cree First Nations.

In the new year they'll be heading up the coast to hold hearings with the Fort Albany, Kashechewan Attawapiskat and Chapleau Cree First Nations.

The public hearings should wrap up in March 2014 and a report should be presented at the Mushkegowuk Council Annual General Assembly. After the AGM it will be made available to the public.

## **AFN's Shawn Atleo sees 'progress' on education reform: Aboriginal Affairs minister promises new funding for schools on reserves if education reform passes**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 10, 2013 3:12 PM ET



*Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo spoke by video on Tuesday morning to the special assembly of chiefs gathered in Gatineau, Que. Atleo is currently in South Africa where he is representing First Nations as part of a Canadian delegation attending Nelson Mandela's memorial. (Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press)*

Inspired by Nelson Mandela's legacy, the National Chief for the Assembly of First Nations Shawn Atleo delivered a message of reconciliation in his opening remarks to a group of chiefs gathered in Gatineau, Que., Tuesday morning.

Atleo's message came just as the federal government promised new funding for schools on reserves if they receive the support of the AFN and a First Nations Education Act becomes law.

The national chief is currently in South Africa where he is representing First Nations as part of the Canadian delegation that attended Mandela's memorial service.

"We lost an incredible, courageous, and inspirational indigenous hero last week, Madiba, as he was known to his peoples," Atleo said in a video message recorded before his departure to Johannesburg.

"The connection to all indigenous people is critical and it is important to pay our deepest respects to a man that not only lifted the oppressive chains of apartheid from his people, but also helped a nation come together with their painful past and find a place of reconciliation.

"Indeed he showed the world not only why reconciliation was essential, but how it can be achieved," Atleo said.

### **'Progress' on education reform**

First Nations leaders are gathering for a bi-annual special assembly of chiefs from Dec.10-12 in Gatineau to address the priorities facing their communities, including the government's controversial proposed First Nations education reform.

Atleo, in his pre-recorded video message, appeared to indicate that some progress had been made on the proposed First Nations education legislation since he wrote to Bernard Valcourt, the minister of aboriginal affairs, two weeks ago.

In an open letter on Nov. 25 to Valcourt, the national chief said "the current federal proposal for a bill for First Nation education is not acceptable to First Nations."

On Tuesday Atleo said, "we are calling for First Nations control of First Nations education in systems that meaningfully recognize our languages and cultures supported by stable, sustainable and fair funding."

"We're making progress and continue to press ahead," Atleo said in his message to the chiefs.

### **Federal funding**

Valcourt announced this week that the federal government will provide new funding for schools on reserves but only with the support of First Nations and only when new legislation is passed.

"Our government intends to invest new funds in K-12 education on reserve once a new legislative framework is passed, but we will not be able to advance legislation without support from First Nations," Valcourt told CBC News in a written statement on Tuesday.

Valcourt described the federal government's resolve to seeing that First Nations children have access to the same education rights and protections that are currently available to other Canadians as "strong."

During question period on Tuesday, Jean Crowder, the NDP critic for aboriginal affairs, criticized Valcourt for making new funding for schools on reserves contingent on support for the government's proposed education reform.

"This minister is promising new funds only if he gets his way," Crowder told the Commons on Tuesday.

Valcourt fired back "we must work together – First Nations, governments, stakeholders, parents, students – in order to ensure that we have a system that can provide First Nations students with a good education system."

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau also pressed the federal government on funding to First Nations education.

Consultations over a First Nations education draft legislative proposal are ongoing.

The federal government hopes to have new legislation in place by the fall of 2014.

### **Idle No More protesters**

While their leaders met, [First Nations protesters](#) marched from Victoria island to Parliament Hill in support of the Idle No More movement.

Atleo, in his video message, said the real enemy is "the status quo."

"There are always reasons to say no. We can always criticize any new approach or initiative whether it's by the government or by us. But that's not enough. That's only half the job."

The national chief called on all First Nations to come together to bring about the change they want to see in their communities.

"Division allows governments to ignore us. The elders remind us that the colonizer loves nothing more than when we fight amongst ourselves."

### **One year later, Idle No More march attracts much smaller protest group**

[CityTV](#)

December 11, 2013



*Idle No More protesters demonstrate at the base of the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor Ontario, Jan. 16, 2013. About 1000 demonstrators disrupted traffic to the country's busiest border crossing for several hours. THE CANADIAN PRESS/ Geoff Robins*

On the one-year anniversary of Idle No More, the aboriginal rights movement,

about 50 activists marched from Victoria Island to Parliament Hill to protest a reform plan for aboriginal schools.

"It's not only an issue of saying 'We don't accept, we want the (Indian) Act kicked out,'" said Chief Gilbert Whiteduck of the Maniwaki First Nation.

"Unless we develop it, what little we have now is leading to ... extermination and termination."

Protesters drummed, chanted and waved flags, saying Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt has ignored the educational demands of First Nations.

They said the proposed First Nations Education Act fails to provide adequate funding and gives too much power to Ottawa and not enough to aboriginal peoples.

"Nobody can put us in line. These are our children," said Whiteduck.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau said Valcourt's proposed plan fails to address the massive education funding disparity between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children.

"We have to talk about treating Canadians fairly, regardless of the communities they're in," Trudeau said.

"We need to make sure we are funding First Nations education to the same level, if not more, depending on the circumstances and the needs, that we do any other Canadians."

Valcourt said he will continue to work with the Assembly of First Nations, but that simply increasing funding will not by itself reform the education system to improve outcomes for students.

Last year, Idle No More protests attracted thousands marching down Wellington Street to Parliament Hill, with police escorts.

Other speakers at Tuesday's protest included Chief Theresa Spence, who launched a protest fast last year, and NDP MP Romeo Saganash.

## **On-reserve water quality barriers in the Prince Albert area**

[Prince Albert Daily Herald](#)

December 11, 2013

Tyler Clarke

Chiefs and council in Saskatchewan are struggling to provide their communities with clean drinking water, and with new regulations in place the pressure's on.



*University of Saskatchewan project manager Rebecca Zagozewski and associate professor Lalita Bharadwaj, from left, are seen in the Saskatchewan Forest Centre after Tuesday's Prince Albert Model Forest board meeting. © Herald photo by Tyler Clarke*

The federal Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, also known as Bill S-8, passed in June, with 165 MPs voting in its favour, including the vote of Prince Albert MP Randy Hoback, and 115 MPs voting against it.

The act, in part, transfers the legal liabilities of water quality onto chiefs and their council, summarized Lalita Bharadwaj, associate professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

"Now they're legally responsible for any repercussion of not meeting those regulations," she said, adding chiefs and council they face significant financial barriers in doing so.

Joined by project manager Rebecca Zagozewski, Bharadwaj provided the Prince Albert Model Forest with an update on their ongoing project, titled "Water Regulations: Impacts on First Nations Health Equity and Promotion," which has been underway since 2009.

The project has studied four First Nations communities around Prince Albert, Bharadwaj summarized after the duo's presentation.

Reluctant to share any specifics before they've gathered samples from a larger selection of communities, she said that water quality results and community feedback has been varied, though many communities have antiquated water utility infrastructure.

The main barrier to providing residents with clean drinking water is the limited funding chiefs and council are given to provide the service.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada funds water treatment and distribution efforts at a level of 80 per cent

"Water is a right," Zagozewski said. "Most places -- except for one community -- they will not charge their people for water."

"I don't think the government gets it through their heads that that 20 per cent is not going to come from the community."

They tender out the bids to make these water treatment plants to the lowest bidder, so the lowest bidder is going to find whatever parts they can -- out of date, whatever -- so these water treatment plants get put up, and then six months later they need a part and can't get them (because it's) out of date. *Rebecca Zagozewski*

With limited funding has come cut corners, Zagozewski said.

"They tender out the bids to make these water treatment plants to the lowest bidder, so the lowest bidder is going to find whatever parts they can -- out of date, whatever -- so these water treatment plants get put up, and then six months later they need a part and can't get them (because it's) out of date."

In addition to taking water samples from the source and from within homes, one of Zagozewski's key roles has been interviewing people on-reserve.

Relaying the contents of an interview with one water treatment plant officer, Zagozewski said that one man recognized that "they aren't producing the best water they could."

"In some areas I've heard of the operator saying 'I can't do this anymore,' and they just walk away from it," Zagozewski relayed.

During Tuesday's meeting with the Prince Albert Model Forest, Bharadwaj and Zagozewski networked some new contacts in order to expand their research to other First Nations communities in the province.

They expect their findings to add some clout to the requests that chiefs and council make when it comes to added federal funding for water utility infrastructure.

"The results are owned by the communities -- they own and posses the data," Bharadwaj said.

"I really am passionate about getting this issue on the table more often, and just giving voices to the communities around some of the challenges."

## **Mandela to be buried with eagle feather**

[\*\*APTN National News\*\*](#)

December 11, 2013



*Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo performs a ceremony in honour of Nelson Mandela in Pretoria, South Africa. Photo courtesy of the AFN*

**APTN National News**

**GATINEAU, Que.**—Nelson Mandela will be buried with an eagle feather

brought to South Africa by Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo, it was announced at a special chiefs assembly Wednesday.

The eagle feather will travel with Mandela's body to Qunu, the place where the man known to his people as Madiba grew-up and which will be laid to rest. Mandela will be buried there Sunday.

Atleo gave the eagle feather to Canada's high commissioner to South Africa who has the task of ensuring the feather gets into the hands of the South African government for Mandela's final journey. Atleo also gave a smaller eagle feather to the high commissioner as a "gesture of friendship" and a symbol of the importance of the task.

"The eagle feather was given to the high commissioner who has been charged with the responsibility," said Ovide Mercredi, a former AFN national chief, who broke the news Wednesday morning to chiefs gathered in a Gatineau, Que., casino this week for their yearly winter assembly.

Mercredi said the eagle feather was handed over following a ceremony in Mandela's honour requested by Atleo involving the Canadian delegation, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Atleo sang a song from his nation used to honour the death of hereditary leaders, said Mercredi.

Mandela was not only once president of South Africa and a leader in the fight against apartheid; he was also a hereditary leader among the Xhosa. His father was a tribal chief in Transkei and named Mandela Rolihlahla at birth. Rolihlahla means "pulling branches of a tree," but colloquially it also means "troublemaker," according to the Nelson Mandela Foundation's website.

"Our national chief was given the opportunity to perform a particular ceremony while Mandela was lying in state," said Mercredi. "Our national chief said his prayer and also sang a song that is particular to his nation, a song that they used to recognize leadership and in particular hereditary chiefs and the name as you know that Mandela has been given is Madiba which is in recognition of his status within his nation, with his own people as a hereditary leader."

Madiba is the name of Mandela's clan and stems from the name of a Thembu chief who ruled in the Transkei during the 18th century, according to the foundation.

Mercredi said the ceremony included Harper, three former prime ministers, two former governor generals and the premiers who were part of the Canadian delegation. Former governor-general Adrienne Clarkson held an eagle feather during the ceremony.

Mercredi also said that Atleo also discussed Mandela's legacy and the current relationship between Canada and its Indigenous population with former prime ministers Jean Chretien and Joe Clark.

"(They discussed) the importance of bringing to Canada the teachings and lessons provided by Mandela with respect to peace and reconciliation," said Mercredi. "That leadership needs to be demonstrated in this country...The national chief is reporting to us that he has begun that dialogue of reconciliation of justice with the leaders he is travelling with."

## **Opportunity knocks for aboriginal students: *Kirkness foundation program expands***

[Peak Online](#)

December 10, 2013

Chris Bolster



EDUCATION ADVOCATE: Ron Woznow is chair of Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation which aims to increase the number of aboriginal students in science and engineering programs in Canadian colleges and universities.

A program designed to address the under-representation of aboriginal students in Canadian universities is expanding with a Powell River connection.

Since 2008 Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation has worked to increase the number of First Nation, Metis and Inuit students graduating from science and engineering programs in Canada by offering high school students a unique opportunity. The foundation's namesake, a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation, is a national leader in education and advocate for aboriginal education.

The program offers scholarships to grade 11 aboriginal students to spend a week in a research lab at the University of Manitoba (U of M). During their week on campus the students meet role models and mentors and experience the excitement of doing

university level scientific research.

"It's more than a university orientation," said Ron Woznow, foundation chair. "They are going to live in residence, eat residence food, discover the campus. This is different than a university orientation—it's an opportunity to excite them about research."

Gerry Brach is a School District 47 counsellor and serves as the head teacher at Ahms Tah Ow School, which operates in partnership between the school district and Tla'amin (Sliammon) First Nation. The school gives high school students an opportunity to learn about Tla'amin language and culture.

Aboriginal students are about three times less likely than other Canadians to complete a degree, said Brach.

He estimates that while 70 per cent of aboriginal high school students say they plan to go to college or university, in actuality less than eight per cent complete a degree. He added that of those eight per cent a fraction are graduating with science or engineering degrees. "It's probably one or two per cent—a very low number anyway," he said.

Barriers for aboriginal students was a topic of discussion at a 2011 Queens University conference on indigenous issues in post-secondary education. In his address to the conference, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo recognized the legacy of residential schools.

"Education has been an instrument of oppression used against us, emphasizing the removal of our identities, the fracturing of our families and the elimination of our ways of communication, thinking and being," said Atleo. "Our challenge today is to work together to...turn education from an instrument of oppression to a tool of liberation."

The program has been embraced by faculty, staff and researchers at U of M.

Woznow hopes that as more aboriginal students study food science, community health improves as the connections between nutrition, food choices and health are strengthened.

"We were looking at the rates of diabetes and obesity on reserves in Canada—it's epidemic," he said.

Research topics that students have worked on include analyzing different water sources for bacteria concentration and learning how to improve the nutritional yield of various types of flours.

"If you had an engineering degree and you had the opportunity to return to help build a sewage treatment system and do things that would create fundamental change in the community, we believe there's a much better chance you'd go and make it happen," said Woznow. "It's the same if you are a teacher or a health worker."

The foundation approached the president of U of M because Woznow, an adjunct faculty member at the University of Guelph and executive for a research organization, had worked with U of M faculty and researchers previously and was impressed by the work being done in food and kinesiology research.

"I've always been a believer that you can change the world by working with young people and grandparents," said Woznow.

The program is designed to create long-term connections between the students and their mentors, he added. Students receive a laptop computer as part of the scholarship, so they are able to stay in touch.

The foundation is funded by Canadian corporate donations from Canada Trust, Power Corporation of Canada and Merck & Co. as well as support from U of M. Woznow said that while it might not be particularly special for a foundation to have corporate sponsorship, what sets the organization apart is that the board members cover all administrative costs themselves.

"One hundred per cent of donations help get students to the University of Manitoba," he said.

Now that the program and logistics are working well, said Woznow, the foundation board is looking to expand and Powell River figures heavily in their decision.

Woznow lived in Vancouver for 20 years before moving to Guelph and has a cabin south of Powell River on Hardy Island. He and his wife Susan O'Brien, an American from San Diego, decided last October to spend some time at their cabin and explore Powell River.

"This is where we want to live," said Woznow, who has lived in eight Canadian cities. "It's got a community spirit that's just unparalleled—not to mention the physical beauty. I've never experienced the type of community spirit."

He added that it did not take long before he and O'Brien started talking about how Powell River would be a great place for the foundation's program. The foundation is currently talking with representatives from Vancouver Island University, the school district, Powell River Academy of Music and other organizations to create a similar kind of program but with a fine arts focus.

Brach said that five Powell River students have already applied for the next session over spring break at U of M and the foundation's work has inspired him to try to develop similar mentorship opportunities.

"Five is an incredible number, but think if it were 25 or 35," he added, saying the school districts are usually only able to send two students to the program each year.

## **Aboriginal Affairs DM made "snide remark" about Idle No More's silence: BC Chief**

[APTN National News](#)

December 11, 2013



*(Aboriginal Affairs deputy minister Michael Wernick. Photo Carleton University website)*

**GATINEAU, Que.**—A senior British Columbia chief says the deputy minister of Aboriginal Affairs made a "snide remark" about the lack of Idle No More protests during a recent meeting in Ottawa of a committee created after a controversial meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and First Nation chiefs last Jan. 11.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, said Aboriginal Affairs deputy minister Michael Wernick made the remark during a Dec. 6 meeting of the senior oversight committee on comprehensive claims.

"One of the most senior federal officials made a very snide remark," said Phillip. "(Wernick) said something to the effect that there is not as much noise outside this time."

*APTN National News* contacted Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt's office seeking comment, but has of yet not received a response.

Phillip said the remark shows Ottawa won't make any changes until they are directly challenged on the streets through demonstrations.

"The only time they are compelled to act is when we have that noise outside," said Phillip. "We need to actually manifest ourselves as nations."

Phillip's statements came during a debate at the Assembly of First Nations special chiefs meeting in a Gatineau, Que., casino around the senior oversight committee on comprehensive claims, also known as modern day treaties.

Chiefs were warned that Ottawa's modern-day treaty process was a "trap" aimed at "extinguishing" their rights.



*(Arthur Manuel, left, proxy for Neskonzith Indian Band, and Russ Diabo, right, proxy for Wold Lake First Nation. APTN/Photo)*

First Nations negotiating modern-day treaties will become beggars in their own lands, said a representative from a British Columbia First Nation sent to speak on behalf of his community's chief at the Assembly of First Nations winter gathering.

Arthur Manuel, who is a proxy for the Neskonzith Indian Band in B.C., said his community won't negotiate with Ottawa until "extinguishment" is taken off the table.

"We know that is their real goal and objective because it has to do with our land," said Manuel.

Manuel said reserve lands make up just 0.2 per cent of all land in Canada.

"What does (Prime Minister Stephen) Harper represent? He represents 99.8 per cent. Who is going to be rich and who is going to be poor? The guy who gets 0.2 is going to be poor," said Manuel. "You need to deal with land before you deal with self government because you'll be a beggar in your own land."

Manuel was responding to a presentation by AFN B.C. regional chief Jody Wilson-Raybould on the progress of the senior oversight committee which includes senior federal officials and First Nation representatives. Wilson-Raybould spoke about the need to transform federal policy on the issue.

Manuel said the committee would do little to change the current aim of things.

"If you are going to change the policy all you are saying is talking about Harper's political decision. That is what policies are, it is a political decision, it has nothing to do with the law," said Manuel. "You need to talk about what kind of political weight, political impetus to change the prime minister's mind and I do not believe SOC (the senior oversight committee) is strong enough...scrap the SOC, get rid of it because it's not going to meet the needs of Indigenous people in this country."

Russ Diabo, a proxy for Wolf Lake First Nation in Quebec, said Ottawa wants "extinguishment" and was pushing for it at 93 negotiating tables with individual First Nation communities while the AFN was trying to convince the federal government to change its policies.

"Meanwhile we are sitting here talking about reconciliation," said Diabo. "What you are doing is exchanging pre-existing rights for new rights and they are diminished rights and it is to become Canadian within the Canadian federation...Are we falling into a trap here?"

Diabo made similar comments during a preliminary session Monday and Wilson-Raybould addressed it directly during her presentation and referred to Nelson Mandela in her response.

"Somebody said they do not support reconciliation or don't need reconciliation and to me this was an interesting comment to make. It is a bit of a dangerous comment or a sad comment," she said. "We have to come together to be building or our nations or builders of a broader country that we have to live in."

A separate senior oversight committee was also created from the Jan. 11 meeting to discuss treaties and it's also facing resistance from some chiefs.

"I am afraid for my children, I am afraid if we continue down this pass with this SOC process, if we continue to give it more legitimacy than we already have, I fear we are in trouble," said Serpent River First Nation Chief Isadore Day, from Ontario.

Day, responding to a presentation on the treaty SOC by AFN Saskatchewan regional chief Perry Bellegarde, said the AFN had no mandate from chiefs to enter into the SOC talks.

"If you give proof to me that this SOC has been formally endorsed and we have given mandate of full force to proceed, until then, there is no mandate for SOC," said Day, to clapping in the audience.

Bellegarde, who is believed to be angling for a run to replace Atleo in 2015, said he welcomed the comments.

"That's what this is all about, dialogue," he said. "You see the diversity across this land in terms of treaties."

But it was an AFN youth delegate from Onion Lake First Nation who triggered the loudest applause after he took the microphone, which is reserved for chiefs or their proxies.

"I hear people talk about sovereignty, talk about rights, all these things, but do they understand them," said Clayton Tootoosis, who is from Treaty 6. "We were born with these rights, given to us from the Creator."

Tootoosis, who was given the right to speak at the microphone by one of the chiefs in the assembly, said it bothered him that chiefs talked about treaties and money in the same breath.

"We are here talking within this casino, talking about money, talking about treaty," said Tootoosis. "But it seems we have forgotten who we are, I know exactly who I am, I come to this earth. Let us remember who we are and where we come from...We are not about money, that is not our way."

## **Two Edmonton school boards reporting improved results for First Nations**

[Metro News](#)

December 12, 2013



*File Photo Both Edmonton's public and catholic school boards are reporting positive improvements for its First Nation Results.*

Aboriginal students in Edmonton Catholic and Public schools are dropping out at lower rates than ever before, according to new numbers.

"We are having more students complete (high school) and fewer students

dropping out," said Eileen Marthiensen, program co-ordinator. EPSB reported a decrease in aboriginal students drop out rate, from 11.8 per cent over a three-year average to 9.4 per cent in 2013.

"We have a large number of students overall," she added. "We have over 7,600 students that self-identify as First Nations, Metis and Inuit within our district. With a

larger population, you are going to have numbers more like this. I think our numbers are somewhat on par with the province."

While the district also saw an improvement in the rate of high-school completion from 26.2 per cent over the last three-year average to 30.3 per cent in 2013, there was a decline in the rate which students transition from high school to work from 24.5 per cent over three years to 23.7 per cent in 2013.

"I would say we are improving, we are not there yet," Marthiensen said. "We are certainly moving towards reducing the achievement gap."

Edmonton Catholic Schools said they also saw positive growth for aboriginal students in 2013, with a high school completion rate of 48.8 per cent in 2013, up from 29.8 over the last three years.

"We are very excited about the work we do in the district," said Joe Naccarato, assistant superintendent for ECSB.

With 2,945 self-identified students in the district, Naccarato said ECS has focused on retention and sharing information with aboriginal students.

Manager for the Aboriginal Education Centre at MacEwan University Kathy Davis echoed both school boards comments.

"I think both Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic are doing very well in not only transitioning their students from junior high to senior high, they are doing really well for transitioning their high school students to come into post secondary."

## **Paul Band First Nation prefers pipelines rather than oil-by-rail**

[Canada NewsWire](#)

December 12, 2013



DUFFIELD, AB, Dec. 12, 2013 /CNW/ - Chief and Council of the 1,926-member Paul Band First Nation, 50 kilometers west of Edmonton, today stated that they generally support the responsible and respectful expansion of Canada's pipeline infrastructure as the preferred transportation mode for moving increased volumes of Alberta oil and gas production to new offshore markets. This includes support for the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project, where a facts-based and highly-respectful First Nations Community Engagement due diligence

process with the Paul Band Chief and Council, administration and community has been underway for some time.

The Paul Band First Nation has seen seven major train derailments since 1987, including two (1995 and 2005) where major derailments resulted in extremely dangerous and hazardous hydrocarbons, and in large volumes, spilling into and damaging environmentally- and culturally-significant ecosystems - ecosystems essential to the Nation's way of life.

"Everyone is an expert in the pipelines versus oil-by-rail debate, but we know first-hand where the actual risks have been for our people over the past few decades because we have lived it," said Casey Bird, Chief of the Paul Band First Nation. "Trains continue to pass through our community and through our Traditional Territories, but now carrying very different and much more dangerous and hazardous cargos than they have in the past. And the 'track record' has not been good, nor is it getting any better."

"I have never lived in Toronto, but some in our community are now beginning to say that we live right next door to the rail equivalent of the 401 Highway, one of North America's busiest highways," Chief Bird added. "Do these increased and more hazardous shipments - which now go way beyond where they were when the line was first built, or even just a few short decades ago - impact our community, our people and our traditional ways and values? Yes, Yes, Yes and Yes...and that is why we are speaking out today."

Chief Bird concluded by reading from a prepared statement:

"Paul Band recognizes that there are always risks involved in the transportation of liquid hydrocarbons, and this includes pipelines, but we have lived through some pretty serious train derailments that have only reinforced our concerns in moving oil-by-rail. We want to publicly state that we generally support pipelines as the preferred transportation choice - some might say the lesser of two poisons, but clearly the lower risk option - for shipping increased volumes of oil through our Traditional Territories."

"But only if this is done respectfully, with the appropriate regulatory oversight, and through close and ongoing consultations, engagement and involvement with First Nations communities, the true stewards of the lands that others often see only as project development sites."

"We have seen this highly-respectful approach taken by Trans Mountain and wish them well as they continue to go through the regulatory approval process."

SOURCE Paul Band First Nation

## Why is Ottawa consigning First Nations to inferior education?

[Globe and Mail](#)

Dec. 11 2013, 3:35 PM EST

Hayden King



*Assembly of First Nations Youth Council member Clayton Tootoosis takes part in a Assembly of First Nations rally on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2013.*  
*(Sean Kilpatrick/THE CANADIAN PRESS)*

It has been one year since the emergence of Idle No More, the most recent articulation of the oldest activism in North America, and very little has changed. The relationship between indigenous peoples and the federal government is worse today than it was in December, 2012, a time when leaders starved themselves for some of the things Canadians take for granted. And the apathy of those Canadians is still profound, unmoved by tens of thousands of protesters in streets and malls. An example of this dysfunctional relationship is manifest in First Nations education policy.

On the first anniversary of the so-called "Round Dance Revolution," Anishinaabe and Cayuga peoples, among others, were once again on the steps of Parliament. This time frustrated and angry with the federal government's proposed First Nations Education Act (FNEA), legislation that would amend the Indian Act's sections on community education, encouraging the creation of regional First Nations school boards and potentially transferring control of education to provincial jurisdictions. The crux of the debate is about power.

According to government literature, the proposed act allows "First Nation control over First Nation education" and "respects treaty rights" and "provides the

opportunity to structure the schools in a way that respects community and cultural concerns” – all wonderful prescriptions ... if they were actually in the proposed act. Instead, the legislation liquidates the limited control over primary education communities do have and re-installs the minister of Aboriginal Affairs as school superintendent.

With the proposed act, the minister: decides if schools are meeting imposed standards; can take over administration of schools that aren’t (leading to the inevitable rise of the third-party education manager); determines qualifications for school staff and administrators; approves budgets; and, finally, transports us back to 1846 by setting student disciplinary policy. A man oblivious to irony, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Bernard Valcourt, has called this proposal both “transformational” and “revolutionary.”

But Mr. Valcourt’s most oft-quoted talking point during the rollout of the proposed act has been: “I don’t believe in throwing federal funds at the problem.” This is a virtual guarantee that the chronic underfunding of community education will persist, ensuring the proposed act’s attainment standards won’t be met. First Nations teachers and “problem”-students will be set up for failure.

The philosophy and content of the proposed act is the first issue. The other is the aforementioned persistent apathy of Canadians. With a few exceptions, the public response to FNEA has been positive and the minister’s talking points about resources repeated. The Globe and Mail’s editorial board [endorsed](#) the FNEA repeating, “the solution is not to just throw more money at the problem” and earlier this week another Globe [article](#) said National Chief Shawn Atleo faced the choice of supporting the act or risking “consigning another generation of First Nations children to an inadequate education.”

The implications of these sentiments are twofold. First, Dakota and Innu peoples are not worth it. If Canadian schoolchildren in any region of the country didn’t have clean water to drink at school the unequivocal solution would be to fix the problem – with money. Not so for native kids. Second, First Nations’ opinions on the act don’t really matter. In other words, even unanimous opposition to the proposed act from actual indigenous people cannot compel reconsidering.

Where does that leave us? I recently heard Jessica Danforth, executive director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, talk about the responsibilities that we as indigenous peoples have for ensuring that the rights of children are maintained. She made it clear that there isn’t a program or service offered by the federal government that can restore that responsibility. *We are the program*, she said. It reminded me of the National Indian Brotherhood’s 1972 “Indian Control of Indian Education,” a policy that placed obligations on children and parents for their own education.

All of this is obvious. But it is an important reminder for indigenous peoples in a Canada that is flooded with forms of racism and paternalism that quality education won't be achieved through appeals to Canadian governments (whatever the treaty right). Merely cost-effective, "reform" further distances First Nations' control of education from First Nations peoples. Consider that in opposition to FNEA, leaders are forced to defend the current system, which we know isn't effective either. Are the only options bad or worse?

Instead, the escape from this inertia might require communities to disengage with the system altogether. This would require more will than currently exists from community leadership, a steep commitment from educators and administrators, and even more sacrifice from students. But it might allow communities to be pro-active, to teach and learn in Anishinaabemowin or Kanien'kéha, to cultivate land-based education, and to actually live autonomously. Perhaps this is the type of activism we should be considering.

*Hayden King is Anishinaabe from Beausoleil First Nation on Ghamnissing in Huronia, Ont. He is the director for the Centre of Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University in Toronto.*

## **B.C. First Nations eye LNG equity stakes**

[Globe and Mail](#)

Dec. 11 2013, 7:14 PM EST

Shawn McCarthy



*All aspects of the future B.C. energy business, from extraction to processing and shipping is of interest to First Nations. (DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS)*

First Nations leaders in British Columbia are seeking multibillion-dollar loan guarantees from the federal government to enable them to take ownership stakes in various liquefied natural gas projects being planned in the province, and have also travelled to China and Japan looking for backers.

The bid to raise financing comes as the Assembly of First Nations launches an effort to forge an aboriginal national energy strategy, which would be based on treaty rights, sustainable development and the need for impoverished communities to benefit from the massive resource development that Canada expects over the next decade.

"What is absolutely clear is that unless First Nations are included as full partners in development, the prospects for projects proceeding are negligible," said Dave Porter, chief executive of British Columbia First Nations Energy and Mining Council.

He said aboriginal communities will resort to the courts if Ottawa presses ahead over their objections with pipeline projects such as Enbridge Inc.'s Northern Gateway.

But Mr. Porter said there is an opportunity for industry to partner with First Nations, especially on proposals to develop shale gas fields in northeastern B.C., and build liquefaction plants on the coast to ship the LNG to Asia. There are a dozen projects under consideration, and the British Columbia government is eager to have at least five approved by the end of 2015.

Ottawa has supported Newfoundland and Labrador's Lower Churchill project with a \$5-billion loan guarantee, and Mr. Porter said the Harper government has described resource projects in B.C. as being in the national interest as the country looks to diversify its energy export market away from a near-total reliance on the United States, to access fast-growing Asia.

"If these projects are deemed to be in the national interest, then surely we're going to see a positive response," Mr. Porter said. "Because in my view, Canada will not reach its full economic potential until it reconciles the place of First Nations, which means direct involvement in joint planning, joint decision-making, and the sharing in the benefits. And that means more than jobs and contracts, it means ownership."

Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver said the government "is not actively considering" loan guarantees for LNG projects. He noted the government has just received a report on aboriginal issues with resource development in Western Canada.

"We will thoroughly review the recommendations before making decisions on next steps," the minister said in an e-mailed statement.

Some B.C. aboriginal communities are already pursuing ownership interest in LNG projects.

The Haisla First Nation is working with three separate projects Kitimat, run by Chevron Corp. and Apache Corp.; the project led by Royal Dutch Shell PLC, and the B.C./ LNG project led by Malaysia's Petronas.

At a conference across the river from Ottawa, AFN leaders said aboriginal communities need their own national energy strategy that would give them a road map for dealing with government and industry on resource development, similar to the provincial effort led by Alberta Premier Alison Redford.

"We want to find a way to articulate the leadership's view and vision of how they want to be involved in resource development in Canada, and how we see resource development incorporating our view on issues such as consultation and managing the lands and sustainability," said Richard Nerysoo, president of the Gwich'in tribal council in the Northwest Territories and co-chair of the AFN's economic development committee.

But the AFN chiefs face their own internal challenges as they look to become partners in oil and gas development.

The push for LNG development is raising fears about fracking in northeastern B.C.

Activist Caleb Behn warned that aboriginal communities are threatened by large-scale development of shale gas, with hydraulic fracturing posing a threat to local water sources.

He urged the AFN chiefs to focus any national strategy on renewable energy development, rather than fossil fuels.

## **Attawapiskat's housing crisis: A ground-level perspective**

[CBC News](#)

Dec 12, 2013 7:22 AM ET

Richard Spence



*This family in Attawapiskat, Ont., lived in a temporary shelter that was evacuated after a recent fire. (Danny Kresnyak)*

Richard Spence, aged 24, was born and raised in Attawapiskat. He is the father of three children with one more baby on the way. He recently completed a mentorship with Journalists for Human Rights Northern Ontario Initiative. He plays guitar and says music saved his life. His dream is to share the strength of that with his community and the rest of the world.

*This story was produced with guidance from Danny Kresnyak of Journalists for Human Rights, as part of JHR's Northern Ontario Initiative. Part of this story was published by Wawatay News and has been republished with permission. Richard Spence is the grand-nephew of Chief Teresa Spence, and he recently began working at the band office in Attawapiskat, Ont.*

Up north, winter is more than a season. It's a full-time occupation.

The first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is kick a leg out from under the blanket to see if the electric furnace in my house is still on. If it isn't, the temperature drop is immediately evident and I have to act fast.

Next I check on my pregnant girlfriend and our three children. Our house has major draft issues, so once I know my family is secure, we bunch blankets, bedsheets and extra clothing into the window frames and other problem areas to seal the cold air out.



*Richard Spence stands in the burnt-out emergency shelter on the Attawapiskat First Nation. (Danny Kresnyak)*

Then I need to track down wood, propane or any other temporary fuel source not requiring a plug-in. Usually, if the power is out, it means we have recently endured a storm and I will have to step outdoors and bear witness to its wrath.

I put on two pairs of heavy socks and thermal underwear with my jeans over top. Then I step into my front porch, where I layer T-shirts under hooded sweatshirts, zip my jacket and put my hood up.

During this process, I feel something like Chris Hadfield in the pre-spacewalk decompression chamber. Like the astronaut departing into frigid space, I can never be totally sure what waits outside the door.

A recent string of disruptions after an earlier outage left houses, hospitals and schools in the James Bay territory in darkness — in some cases, for days.

During this period, the emergency shelter on Attawapiskat's eastern edge was evacuated after candles being used as the sole available heat source ignited curtains in one of the rooms.

Now the people are gone, but the trailers remain. And in the following story, I will examine how it got this way.

### **Roots of Attawapiskat's housing crisis**

Monique Sutherland's first day as Attawapiskat's housing manager was in June 2008. She says she received no special training, the files were scattered and she had no staff.

Not long after she started, the community was forced to declare a housing crisis after a catastrophic sewage backup left many homeless.

Sutherland has persevered in the post longer than her predecessors and has established a more efficient record-keeping system. She oversees a staff of tradespeople, but they still cannot meet demands.



*Denise Okimaw was a resident of the emergency shelter trailer complex on the eastern edge of Attawapiskat First Nation. (Danny Kresnyak)*

She says the 2009 sewer backup was the tipping point, but the roots of the housing crisis are deeper than that, and at current rates it will be years until needs are met.

"We keep on it, but it could 10 or 15 years," she says.

Attawapiskat had to evacuate again in 2013 after spring floods damaged many homes, including the temporary residences of nurses and teachers working in the community.

An anonymous source at the hospital says the lack of housing has contributed to a critical shortage of permanent nurses and emergency relief staff who come to the

community on short-term contracts. Staff have been forced to sleep on the ward, in beds meant to be occupied by the patients they care for.

### **Limited space**

Band members struck by the shortage have options, but wait lists are long and space is limited.

"A lot of people end up having to go to relatives' houses, which are already overcrowded," Sutherland says.

*'Unfortunately, temporary has a way of becoming permanent.'— Wayne Turner, Attawapiskat executive director*

"If they can't, they go to the homeless shelter, but it's full so they have to put up tent frames."

Sutherland also has advice for off-reserve band members with thoughts about returning home: "Stay where you are. You're welcome to visit, but as it sits, we have no houses available."

Before the fire last month, Denise Okimaw was a resident of the emergency shelter trailer complex on the eastern edge of Attawapiskat First Nation. Okimaw says she paid almost \$500 a month to share a single room with her teenage son and had lived there for the last four years.

Before the room in the shelter, Okimaw spent nights in Attawapiskat community hotels, the healing lodge outside of town, and emergency housing in Cochrane, Ont.

Her former home near the river is a four-bedroom white house that now has a padlock on the front door. The house has not been renovated since the sewage backup in 2009. Now she uses it for storage while she stays at the homeless shelter, wondering what's being done to fix it.

### **Solutions and roadblocks**

Sutherland says the housing budget is depleted because some band members in new houses have refused to pay their rent, and many old houses are in need of extensive and expensive repairs.

"Some of the houses are about to collapse. They need to be fixed but we don't have money to buy supplies," she says.



*Paul Kataquapit is building a house in town and spending his own money to have building materials freighted to Attawapiskat, because he is tired of waiting for action from the band and the government. (Danny Kresnyak)*

A new program called RRAP (Rehabilitation Repairs Application Program) has provided some support for houses in need of renovation, but the funding is scheduled to expire at the end of October.

Sutherland says Attawapiskat's funding application to build new houses through the CMHC was denied when Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) refused to guarantee a loan due to accounting inadequacies and a budget deficit.

"We used to build 10, maybe 15 houses some years. Now we aren't able to meet the needs," she says.

Wayne Turner, Attawapiskat's executive director, says housing the displaced is a major drain on band funds.

"We receive no additional funds for transitional housing," he says. "The money all comes from the band's discretionary fund. Unfortunately, temporary has a way of becoming permanent."

He lives on the second floor of the Tony Fireman Healing Lodge, outside of town. The former addictions treatment centre has been appropriated as emergency housing and the main level is full of elders, children and families with no other place to stay.

"We can't tax people, there are many unemployed. If we want to do any project, we have to beg the federal government, and that dependency doesn't solve the problem." — *Chief Teresa Spence*

Turner says the First Nation's chief and council have developed a multiyear housing strategy, funded by \$2.2 million for new home building provided by the federal government.

"The band has already started building. These are the new houses on the west side of town," he says. "The houses are assessed a market value rent and the First Nation backs the mortgage."

Turner explains that people who live in these houses can eventually own the building if they maintain it, but provisions of the Indian Act prevent use the homes to establish equity.

This is one of the biggest issues facing residents, he says.

"What other part of the country can you not leverage what you own into advantages for yourself?"

### **The chief's house**

Chief Teresa Spence lives in a yellow bungalow that was once a police station, down a back alley near the hospital. Her front door opens to a chain-link and black canvas fence at the perimeter of a contamination remediation site.

On her walk to work, she takes a hard-packed grit road frequented by heavy-duty equipment carrying contaminated soil to containment tanks on the outskirts of the First Nation.

She then takes another left at the only sidewalk in Attawapiskat, four one-metre square slabs of concrete connecting the steel grate steps of the mural-embazoned band office to the wooden entry of a graffiti-adorned decommissioned post office.

Spence says present legislation excludes First Nations people from participation in the national economy.

"I've heard from a few people their mortgage was denied because they live on reserve. It shouldn't be that way," she says.

'If you have a good job and have shown yourself responsible, you should be able to have your dream house built."

Spence says the housing budget is a major drain on the band budget, and the band lacks revenue for new projects.

"We can't tax people, there are many unemployed. If we want to do any project, we have to beg the federal government, and that dependency doesn't solve the problem," she says.

Paul Kataquapit is part of a four-person carpentry crew building a house next to his brother's diner in a central section of town. He spent his own money to have building materials freighted to Attawapiskat on the barge because he was "tired of waiting for the band to approve the lot and Indian Affairs [AANDC] to pay for the building."

The frame has gone up quickly, but Kataquapit says he worries about whether the supplies he needs for the roof will make it before the snow sets in.

While he waits to hear from government, his niece and her family had to live in a crowded house, and it was clear to him, he says, that "no one is going to do this for us. We needed to take action ourselves."